

HCS HB 1303 -- MISSOURI STUDENT RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES ACT

This bill establishes the Missouri Student Religious Liberties Act, which prohibits a school district from discriminating against a student or parent on the basis of a religious viewpoint or expression. A student's expression of a religious viewpoint on an otherwise permissible subject must be treated like a student's expression of a secular viewpoint on an otherwise permissible subject. Students may express their religious beliefs in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination, and it must be judged on ordinary academic standards. Students may pray or engage in religious activities before, during, and after school in the same manner and to the same extent they may engage in nonreligious activities and must be given the same access to facilities as other noncurricular groups, including the ability to advertise or announce meetings. Students may wear clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display religious messages or symbols in the same manner and to the same extent that other types of clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display messages or symbols are permitted.

Each school district must adopt a policy that includes the establishment of a limited public forum for student speakers at all school events at which a student is to speak in public. The policy must require the district to provide the forum in a manner that does not discriminate against a student's voluntary expression of a religious viewpoint; provide a method for the neutral selection of student speakers at school events and graduation ceremonies; ensure that a speaker does not engage in obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd, or indecent speech; and state that a student's speech does not reflect the district's endorsement, sponsorship, position, or expression of the district. The disclaimer must be provided at all graduation ceremonies and at any other event where a need exists to dispel confusion over the district's nonsponsorship of a student's speech.

These provisions must not be construed to allow the state or any of its political subdivisions to require a person to participate in prayer or in any other religious activity or to violate any person's constitutional rights nor to limit the authority of any public school to maintain order and discipline in a neutral manner; protect the safety of students, employees, and visitors of the school; or adopt and enforce policies on student speech that do not violate the rights of students as guaranteed by law.